

***Testimony on Professional Licensure Standards
September 17, 2008 – New Jersey State Board of Education
NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Wendell Steinhauer***

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today with regard to changes in the Professional Licensure Standards.

As NJEA noted last May, we have seen some positive developments, including the Department's strengthening of the alternate route program. We are also pleased that pedagogy courses are now required for K-5 teacher certification.

Furthermore, NJEA appreciates the Department's cooperation with the PTSB on the development of the Professional Responsibility Standard. We also appreciate the further clarification of the role of the teacher in using and teaching educational technology and the role of the School Library Media Specialist in teaching information literacy.

NJEA does have some ongoing concerns.

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We understand that the new higher education program approval process is intended to help measure a program's success at preparing candidates, but we would still like assurance that the information gathered for that purpose will be used only in the aggregate for the program approval process, and not be maintained in such a way that it can be linked to individuals.

We have an additional concern regarding speech-language therapists. The Department has stated, in response to our previous testimony, that it worked with the New Jersey Speech-Language Hearing Association in 1988 to change the certification for speech correctionists and develop a plan for retraining.

However, when the requirements for the new speech-language specialist endorsement became operative, they were not meant to make the speech correctionist certificate invalid.

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A summary statement in the New Jersey *Register* stated, “The proposed requirements will not affect those speech therapists who already hold certificates.”

That intention was reiterated by Leo Klagholz, who was the Director of Teacher Preparation and Certification. In a letter dated April 5, 1988, Dr. Klagholz stated, “These changes have no substantive effect on persons who already hold endorsements that bear the title, ‘speech correctionist.’ ... Their endorsements are 100% valid and qualify them for employment in all positions that bear either title of ‘speech correctionist’ or ‘speech-language specialist.’”

In 1990, this clarification was written into code [NJAC 6:11-11.9(a)] which specifically states “Either the speech correctionist or the speech-language specialist endorsement is required to provide service as a speech-language specialist in all public schools.” It clearly grandfathered those who already possessed the speech-correctionist endorsement.

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A later revision of IDEA regulations mandated that special education personnel meet the “highest” standard of credentials required in the state. This regulation negated the Department’s grandfathering of speech correctionists and put New Jersey’s federal funding for special education at risk.

The Department received conditional approval of its State plan for special education in 1994. The federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and the State agreed that speech correctionists would have until 2010 to upgrade their credentials.

However, the specific mandate which led to that agreement was lifted in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. Under the new IDEA language, speech correctionists may continue to practice, according to the federal government.

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We strongly believe that the State should go back to its original policy and intent of allowing speech correctionists to practice, without a requirement that they obtain additional certification.

On a related issue, with regard to the proposed change for emergency certificates for speech-language specialists, we agree with both the New Jersey Speech-Language Hearing Association and the New Jersey Association of Speech-Language Specialists that the requirements for an emergency certificate should be strengthened.

We continue to have serious concerns about 6A:9-17.1, which deals with mandatory reporting of certain offenses. As currently written, we believe it is still too broad. For example, motor vehicle offenses seem to fall under this regulation.

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We are concerned that certain actions which are non-criminal and unrelated to an individual's school employment will fall under this regulation if it is not clarified. There is no specific statute which authorizes the Board of Examiners to consider such offenses under the background check law.

While we do not believe that is the intent of the regulation, we are very concerned that the language of the regulation introduces unintended consequences. We urge the Department to clarify that language before it is adopted.

Thank you.